

Dear Legislators:

Recently Governor Malloy issued his budget, which completely removes funding for the five Centers for Independent Living (CIL's) within the State including Access Independence. For those of you who might not know what we do, we assist people with all types of disabilities live an independent life within the community. This is done through our five core services, which are:

- Information & Referral
- Independent Life Skill Training
- Advocacy
- Transitional Services
- Peer Support

Last year the CILs saved the State \$5,545,096, which is more than ten times the amount CILs received from the State. If the Governor's budget stands, Connecticut's Centers for Independent Living may not continue to exist. This would be devastating to our seniors, wounded war veterans and disabled populations. One out of five people in Connecticut has a disability.

I joined the United States Marine Corps in 2001 following September 11th, as a 17 year old high school senior. Upon early graduation, I enlisted and served until 2004. During my time of service I acquired a service connected disability which caused me to be honorably discharged two years early from my initial tour of duty. Upon coming back to CT after discharge, as a 20 year old female with a disability, there were not a lot of supports available via the VA for my age group and gender. Without the assistance of my local community college, Housatonic, and the VA rep on campus, I would not have been able to make the connections to the Disabled American Veterans and my local CIL for age appropriate supports for transitioning back into civilian life with a disability.

This proposed budget cut effects a broad and diverse constituency of CT residents who utilize CILs for a variety of reasons and needs. Female veterans utilize VA services at a disproportionate rate as the programs and services they offer don't always connect with our needs. The services at the VA do not always cover a younger population of veterans and up until 2013 "Don't Ask Don't Tell" was the law of the land for not just active and reserve service members but also by extension through the VA. As a LGBT veteran the CILs were one of the only places that LGBT service members could utilize for assistance with transitioning back into civilian life and obtaining assistance in navigating the tenuous nature of paper work and hurdles to obtain assistance with job placement. In a state where LGBT residents have Equal Opportunity Employment rights, marriage equality and are considered a protected status for those seeking housing, access to medical care, etc. the CILs are vital for reaching a population that is marginalized within a minority.

As a former consumer of CIL services, I now serve on the Board of Directors for Access Independence and strongly urge you to support the CILs and put the funding back into this vital resource.

Best,

Ashley McGuffie